

REMARKS
OF
HON. JOHN PERKINS,

OF LOUISIANA,

On presenting from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Resolutions in regard to the Negotiations for Peace.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, to whom was referred the special message of the President and the report of the Commissioners, have directed me to report those communications back, with the recommendation that they be printed and laid on the table. They have also directed me to present for the adoption of the House the following resolutions:

Joint Resolutions expressing the sense of Congress on the subject of the late Peace Commission.

WHEREAS, The Congress of the Confederate States have ever been desirous of an honorable and a permanent settlement, by negotiation, of all matters of difference between the people of the Confederate States of America and the government of the United States, and to this end provided, immediately on its assembling at Montgomery, in February, 1861, for the sending of three commissioners to Washington to negotiate friendly relations on all questions of disagreement between the two governments, on principles of right, justice, equity and good faith; and, whereas, these having been refused a reception, Congress again, on the 14th of June, 1864, adopted and published a manifesto to the civilized world, declaring its continued desire to settle without further shedding of blood, upon honorable terms, all questions at issue between the people of the Confederate States and those of the United

States, to which the only response received from the Congress of the United States has been the voting down, by large majorities, all resolutions proposing an amicable settlement of existing difficulties; and, whereas, the President has communicated to this House that, in the same spirit of conciliation and peace; he recently sent Vice President Stephens, Senator Hunter and Judge Campbell; to hold conference with such persons as the government of the United States might designate to meet them; and, whereas, these eminent citizens, after a full conference with President Lincoln and Secretary Seward, have reported that they were informed explicitly that the authorities of the United States would hold no negotiations with the Confederate States, or any of them separately; that no terms, except such as a conqueror grants to the subjugated, would be extended to the people of these States; and that the subversion of our institutions, and a complete submission to their rule, was the only condition of peace: Therefore,

Resolved, by the Congress of the Confederate States of America, That, while Congress regrets that no alternative is left to the people of the Confederate States but a continuance of the war, or submission to terms of peace alike ruinous and dishonorable, it accepts, in their behalf, the issue tendered them by the authorities of the United States Government, and solemnly declares that it is their unalterable determination to prosecute the war with the United States until that power shall desist from its efforts to subjugate them, and the independence of the Confederate States shall have been established.

Resolved, That the Congress has received with pride the numerous noble and patriotic resolutions passed by the army; and in the gallant and unconquered spirit which they breathe, coming from those who have for years endured dangers and privations, it sees unmistakable evidence that the enthusiasm with which they first dedicated their lives to the defence of their country is not yet extinct, but has been confirmed, by hardships and suffering, into a principle of resistance to Northern rule, that will hold in contempt all disgraceful terms of submission; and for these expressions in camp, as well as for their noble acts in the field, our soldiers deserve, and will receive, the thanks of the country.

Resolved, That the Congress invites the people of these States to assemble in public meetings, and renew their vows of devotion to the cause of independence; to declare their determination to maintain their liberties; to pledge themselves

to do all in their power to fill the ranks of our army; to provide for the support of the families of our soldiers; and to cheer and comfort, by every means, the gallant men who for years, through trials and dangers, have vindicated our rights on the battle field.

Resolved, That, invoking the blessing of God, and confiding in the justice of our cause, in the valor and endurance of our soldiers, and in the deep and ardent devotion of our people to the great principles of civil and political liberty, for which we are contending, Congress pledges itself to the passage of the most energetic measures to secure our ultimate success.

These resolutions were adopted by the committee the day after the subject was referred to them, and have been on my desk ever since, waiting an opportunity, under the rules of the House, to be presented.

They state what has been the policy of Congress on the subject of negotiating for peace with the United States from the beginning of our government, and conclude with a brief but decided expression of opinion on the result of the late commission or negotiation, brought to our attention by the message of the President.

In the preamble of the resolutions reference is made to the fact that the Montgomery Congress, even before it inaugurated the President of the Confederate States, provided by an act dated the 15th of February, 1861, for "a commission of three persons," to be sent "as early as convenient," to negotiate friendly relations between the Confederate States and the Government of the United States, and "to settle all questions of disagreement between them, upon principles of right, justice, equity and good faith;" and that three commissioners, consisting of Ex-Governor Roman, of Louisiana, a gentleman of great influence and worth, and a distinguished member of the old Whig party, and the Hon. John Forsyth, of Alabama, a former minister to Mexico and a prominent member of the Douglas party, and the Hon. Mr. Crawford, of Georgia, a former member of the United States Congress and of the Democratic party, were sent to Washington on this mission of peace

immediately on the inauguration of President Davis; but were refused even an audience by the Federal authorities. The preamble further states the fact that in the month of June, 1864, after the war had progressed for three years, the Congress adopted a *manifesto*, and published it to the world in the most solemn and authentic manner declaring its desire to have an amicable adjustment of all difficulties between the people of the Confederate States and the Government of the United States; and that to this expression no friendly response has ever been made by the Congress of the United States, but that, on the contrary, it has repeatedly voted down, by large majorities, resolutions that merely expressed the hope that the people of the South might enter again upon the peaceful enjoyment of their rights in the Union. The preamble, in conclusion, approves the act of the President in again sending a commission, on the 28th of January last, to negotiate for the restoration of peace, composed of Hon. A. H. Stephens, of Georgia, Vice President of the Confederate States; Hon. R. M. T. Hunter, Senator from Virginia; and Hon. J. A. Campbell, of Alabama, late of the United States Supreme Court, and present Assistant Secretary of War of the Confederate States—three of the most eminent and conservative of our Southern statesmen; and gives as the result of their efforts at negotiation, *“that no terms or proposals of any treaty or agreement looking to an ultimate settlement would be entertained or made by the Federal authorities with the authorities of the Confederate States or the States separately, and that no extended truce or armistice would be granted or allowed without a satisfactory assurance in advance of a complete submission to the rule of the United States government.”*

The resolutions, in view of these facts, express regret that a peaceful settlement of our difficulties has been rendered impossible by the action of the United States authorities, and declare, that sad and dreadful as the people of the Confederate States know from experience the evils of war to be, they will willingly encounter and resolutely endure all the sacrifices of

a continued struggle rather than submit unconditionally to the rule of a government that seeks first to dishonor and then to destroy them.

The second resolution thanks our gallant soldiers for their patriotic expressions of devotion to our cause from the camp, as well as for their noble acts on the battle-field.

The third resolution calls upon the people of the country to assemble in meetings and pledge themselves anew to furnish food and clothing for our soldiers, to provide for their families, and to do all in their power for the success of our arms.

The last resolution is the utterance of Congress itself, and says that, invoking the blessing of God, and relying on the justness of our cause, the noble endurance of our soldiers, and the patriotism of our people, Congress will adopt such energetic measures as, in its judgment, will contribute to the ultimate success of our arms.

I do not suppose, Mr. Speaker, that more is necessary to ensure the adoption of these resolutions than thus briefly to call them to the attention of members; but as they are to be the solemn legislative expression of the country upon the events of the day, they have an importance beyond ordinary resolves, and as the Committee desire their immediate adoption, I will add a few words in further explanation of their purpose and character.

In offering them as pledges of renewed devotion to Southern independence on the part of this Congress, I am reminded of the occasion when, four years ago this very month, I first presented in the Congress, at Montgomery, resolutions pledging the Confederate States to permanent separation from the United States. Since that time the country has given more substantial pledges to the cause in its noble sacrifices on the battle-field. Many of the eminent men who then shared our councils have disappeared; some in the natural course of events—but most have sealed with their lives the dedication they then made of themselves on the newly erected altar of their country. The names, too, that were associated with our

early victories have given place for the most part to those of newer men that, born with the occasion, have risen to fill their places. And yet, sir, with undiminished impetuosity the bloody stream of events which engulfed those men still flows on. Sir, if humanity, outraged by the needless shedding of blood and the perpetration of atrocities such as heretofore have only characterized war among savage people, shall at last lift her voice and call upon Christendom to mark with its reprobation the present barbarous contest, the responsibility will be seen not to have been with us. If hereafter the historian, in drawing the gloomy picture of the fall of the great republic of the West, shall find the cause of its destruction in the present contest, the records of this Congress will show that the Southern States were from the first desirous in every way by negotiation to avert its catastrophe.

But there will be a responsibility attaching to us in the passage of these resolutions that I wish to record and which will be the source of just pride. If, sir, it is ever honorable in a nation's history that in defence of its liberties it gave up the ease and comfort of peace, and hailed with enthusiasm even war, with all its sufferings, rather than submit to dishonor; and that in the progress of war it could be generous in the midst of passion, and so temper justice with humanity as to be willing at all times to negotiate peace with those from whom it had received only wrong; then it will indeed be a circumstance in our history full of dignity and honor, that with cool and resolute determination the people of the Confederate States, though surrounded by the evidence of wide-spread suffering, and with the most earnest desire for peace, accepted, with an unanimity equalled only by that with which they entered upon the contest, the cruel and stern issue presented by the enemy, and that from the people and the army there came up alike the expression of a fixed resolve to continue the struggle until their rights as freemen should be acknowledged.

Mr. Speaker, the expressions that reach us daily from the army are no idle and unmeaning resolves. They come from

the hearts of men who know what war is, and who have not forgotten the enjoyments of peace. They have all the eloquence of heroic acts, and when read at your desk excite within me emotions that I find difficult to express. Sir, the enemy may penetrate our borders, and with ruthless barbarity burn our towns and lay waste our territory, but if the spirit of this government and the people remain as unbroken as that of our soldiers, our final triumph is certain. Such successes, while they do not permanently weaken our power of resistance, will bring them no strength.

A devastated but not a conquered people will rise up behind the march of their armies, and soon, while boasting from victories, they will be suing for peace of those they proclaimed vanquished. A people of the numerical strength, and of the spirit of ours, and inhabiting a country of the extent of ours, with its facilities for military defence, if true to themselves, cannot be conquered. There is a patriotism independent of a man's possessions, or of the particular spot of land on which he lives, and that links the affections to one's country, *because it is his country*, by ties as strong and holy as those that place man in sympathy with his *God*.

The home of our infancy, the hallowed localities of religion and the dead, and the scenes of our daily life, into which have been woven our dearest associations, may be all desolated by the foe, and yet, if there be that strength of soul that comes of noble ends, there will be no despondency. On the contrary, from the very depth of our suffering there will be safety in the determination that is inspired. Sir, I have the same confidence in the success of our struggle at this moment of apparent gloom, that I had at its commencement. There are yet trials before us, the severest we have yet encountered—but I believe our people will bear them with fortitude, and that their resolution will be increased rather than diminished by their sacrifices. I believe that their confidence in the justice of our cause is such that they are ready to say in the words and with the faith of the Apostle:—“*We are troubled on every*

side, yet not dismayed ; we are perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed."

Feeling thus, you will see the resolutions, as I have offered them, do not admit the idea of failure. There *can be no failure* in the presence of the fate that awaits us if we do not succeed. In such a contingency history offers no parallel of what would be our condition. Poetry would find no numbers mournful enough for our funeral dirge. The saddest picture of extinguished nationality ever drawn was that of the Prophet of God, weeping over the desolation of his chosen people, and yet he could only speak of a country laid waste, cities destroyed, and a whole people scattered over the face of the earth. But in our case, it will be far worse. An heroic people—with all the evidences of their separate existence—their honored history and their cherished memories—will be forever merged in, and made to complete the glory of the nationality that crushed them.